IN THE CLAIMS:

Pending claims 20 and 21 are presented below. This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application. Please enter these claims as amended.

Listing of Claims:

1-19. (Canceled).

20. (Previously Presented) A method of testing at least one sample obtained from a mammal for the presence or absence of an aberrant prion protein, the method comprising:

preparing said at least one sample as a tissue homogenate and dividing said at least one sample into two aliquots;

adding protease inhibitors to one first aliquot, and digesting one second aliquot with a protease, followed by the addition of protease inhibitors, so as to compare results before and after proteolysis;

spotting each said aliquot onto a solid phase to prepare a test set and a control set;

denaturing peptides contained within said test set with guanidine thiocyanate or one or more chaotropic agents so as to enhance antibody reactivity towards aberrant PrP protein, while antibody reactivity towards normal PrP protein is reduced or unchanged;

leaving said control set untreated with guanidine thiocyanate;

probing said test set and said control set for PrP protein by immunologically detecting PrP protein by way of an immunoassay with at least one antibody directed against a proteinase K resistant part of the PrP protein; and

comparing said test set to said control set wherein an increase in antibody reactivity among the test set after denaturation in guanidine thiocyanate relative to the control set is objective proof of the presence of PrP^{sc}.

21. (Previously presented) A method for increasing the reliability of a test when testing at least one sample obtained from a mammal for the presence or absence of an aberrant prion protein, the method comprising:

using said at least one sample to prepare a test set and a control set;

denaturing the protein in said test set with guanidine thiocyanate or one or more chaotropic agents so as to enhance antibody reactivity towards aberrant protein, while antibody reactivity towards a normal form of the protein is reduced or unchanged;

leaving said control set untreated with guanidine thiocyanate or one or more chaotropic agents;

probing said test set and said control set with anti-PrP^{sc} antibodies raised against an epitope from an aberrant prion protein for the presence or absence of said aberrant prion protein, wherein said epitope has a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOS:7-30; and

determining with said anti-PrP^{sc} antibodies instances of increased antibody reactivity as a function of denaturation in guanidine thiocyanate or one or more chaotropic agents in the test set versus the control set.